

❖ REPORT ❖

OF THE

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH

FOR THE

WEST DEAN RURAL DISTRICT

FOR THE YEAR ENDING DECEMBER 31st, 1898.

“The West Dean Rural District has a total area of 21,609 acres. It is composed of the Township of West Dean, and the parishes of Newland, English Bicknor and Staunton. The whole District, according to the census of 1891, is said to contain a population of 11,697, but I estimate the population to the middle of 1898 at about 12,147. This is lower than the estimate for last year, which I think was too high.

“West Dean itself is situated on the coal measures, and may be said to be inhabited almost entirely by a mining population. The parishes of Newland, English Bicknor and Staunton are largely agricultural, are situated more on the limestone and iron measures, and in a great part inhabited by miners.

“The births registered during the year numbered 421, or 4 more than last year: 220 were boys and 201 girls. The birth-rate for this year, calculated on the estimated population, was 34·6 per 1000.

“The deaths registered numbered 179, or 15 less than in 1897. This reduces the death rate from 15·2 to 14·73, and the reduction would be more had I estimated the population higher. The deaths from zymotic diseases were—2 from diphtheria, 1 erysipelas and 1 whooping cough. Influenza, with its complications, was responsible for 8 deaths, and these occurred almost entirely among the aged and debilitated. 18 persons died of phthisis, and 18 of heart affections. 69 persons died at an average age of 75 years. 38 infants died under one year of age, giving an infant death-rate of 90·26 for 1000 births. Of these, the chief causes of death were—premature birth, 7; broncho-pneumonia, 8; marasmus or wasting, 5; diarrhoea and gastro enteritis, 5.

“Only 7 cases of zymotic sickness were reported under the Infectious Diseases Notification Act—4 of diphtheria and 3 of erysipelas. The first case of diphtheria occurred in a house at Barnhill on the 23rd of February. Towards the end of May the same disease broke out in a house at Clearwell, where 3 cases occurred in one family, two of which ended fatally. As epidemic varicella existed in this village at the same time it was thought advisable to close the schools there, and that was done from May 21st to June 21st. A special report on the matter was sent at the same time to the Local Government Board. I may add that the Schools at English Bicknor were also closed for 3 weeks after the 20th of January on account of an epidemic of measles. Prior to the order being made one of the school managers, writing to the Medical Officer of Health at that time, states that 35 out of 68 children were absent from school. Now, it is impossible to say how many of these absent children really had measles, or how many were kept away from school owing to fear of their catching the infection. This, in my opinion, clearly shows that measles ought to be included in the list of diseases coming under the Infectious Diseases Notification Act. If so included, early notification would facilitate the isolation of infected families, and often render the closing of schools unnecessary. The cases of erysipelas occurred before the date of my appointment as your Medical Officer of Health, but they do not seem to have been serious.

“Owing to the dwelling houses being scattered, a system of sewerage for the district, even if attempted for each separate village, hamlet or group of houses, would be not only ruinously costly, but well nigh impracticable. The dwellings are mostly detached cottages, built here or there on freehold patches of ground, formerly portions of the waste land of Her Majesty's Forest of Dean. At present the sanitary system mostly adopted by the cottagers is a separate one for each house, somewhat as follows:—The house stands at the top corner of the plot facing the receding slope. The latter forms a vegetable garden, having a privy and pigstye at the far end. One, but seldom both of these, is provided with a cess-pit. There are no house drains, the waste water being usually thrown upon the garden to promote the growth of vegetables, while the ashes, &c., are deposited on the open Forest in the vicinity of the back door.

“ Rain water reservoirs are constructed in the basements of nearly all recently built houses, but of the older houses by far the greater number have to depend for their water supply upon the nearest wells. These wells are mostly shallow surface wells, and are seldom protected from the possibility of contamination. A few only are furnished with bucket and windlass, the custom being for people to draw water in their own vessels. This is objectionable, as the vessels are not always clean. I am glad to be able to report that these wells are now receiving the attention of the Parish Councils of the district.

“ Monthly house to house inspections have been made by the Inspector and myself, with the result that many nuisances have already been discovered and abated. Owing to the extent of the district the whole area has not yet been covered, but the inspections are being carried out on systematic lines with a view of dealing with each portion thoroughly.

“ Among the nuisances which have been abated by the Council during the year are—5 cases of overcrowding, 14 houses unfit for human habitation, 33 filthy privies and cesspools, 45 foul pigsties, and 9 wells polluted, or in danger of being polluted.

“ The chief indications for improvement in the sanitary state of the district in general are in the first place, better protection of the existing water supplies from contamination, and the provision of further supplies where required ; secondly, the alteration or demolition of old, unsafe and unhealthy buildings, as these old dwellings are one of the most powerful factors in causing poverty, ill-health, and pauperism in the district ; thirdly, the adoption of byelaws suitable to the district, more especially for the proper regulation of all new buildings, so as to secure their proper sanitary condition before being occupied.

“ P. BUCHANAN, M.B.,

“ *Medical Officer of Health.*

“ COLEFORD, March 3rd, 1899.”

TABLE OF DEATHS during the year 1898, in the WEST DEAN RURAL DISTRICT, classified according to

DISEASES, AGES and LOCALITIES.

MORTALITY FROM ALL CAUSES, AT SUBJOINED AGES.										MORTALITY FROM SUBJOINED CAUSES, DISTINGUISHING DEATHS OF CHILDREN UNDER FIVE YEARS OF AGE.																							
NAMES OF LOCALITIES adopted for the purpose of these Statistics; public insti- tutions being shown as separate localities.										(i)	1	2	3	4	5	FEVERS.					10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
	Under 1 year.	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)	(f)	(g)	(h)																								
WEST DEAN (com- prised of the Parishes of WEST DEAN, NEW- LAND, STAUNTON, and ENGLISH BICKNOR.)	179	38	8	5	8					Under 5 5 upwards	Smallpox.	Scarlatina.	Diphtheria.	Membranous Croup.	Influenza. 8	Enteric or Typhoid.	Continued.	Relapsing.	Puerperal.		Cholera.	Erysipelas.	Measles.	Whooping Cough.	Diarrhoea and Dysentery.	Rheumatic Fever.	Phthisis.	Bronchitis, Pneumonia and Pleurisy.	Heart Disease.	Cancer and Malignant Tumours.	Injuries.	All Other Diseases.	TOTAL.
Totals.....	179	38	8	5	8		51	69		Under 5 5 upwards			1		8						1	1		1	5		10	18	1		27	46	

TABLE OF POPULATION, BIRTHS, AND OF NEW CASES OF INFECTIOUS SICKNESS, coming to the knowledge of the Medical

Officer of Health, during the Year 1898, in the WEST DEAN RURAL DISTRICT; classified according to DISEASES, AGES and

LOCALITIES.

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